



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 19, 2013

MEDIA CONTACTS
Jerome Clark | 928.637.5603
Carmenlita Chief | 928.255.3428
Jared Touchin | 928.221.9253
nnlb.communications@gmail.com

Budget and Finance Committee approves cross-commission agreement between the Navajo Nation and the Navajo County Sheriff's Office

WINDOW ROCK – The Budget and Finance Committee approved Legislation No. 0036-13 granting certain law enforcement powers to Navajo Nation Police Officers and Navajo County Sheriff deputies.

Supporters of the legislation stated that the agreement will benefit both sides by allowing police from Navajo County to assist Navajo police in enforcing criminal and traffic laws and vice versa.

Navajo County Officers will have the authority to arrest Navajo people on the reservation when called upon to assist in situations when Navajo Police are unable to respond to calls.

The agreement also gives Navajo Police the authority to arrest non-Navajos when they commit a crime on the reservation.

The legislation's primary sponsor, Council Delegate Elmer Begay (Dilkon, Indian Wells, Teesto, Whitecone, Greasewood Springs), pointed out the rising crime rates within his chapters especially those dealing with domestic violence.

"This agreement is in the best interest of Navajo people living in the southwest portion of the reservation," Delegate Begay stated.

"In my region we get three officers per shift which cover seven communities," legislation co-sponsor Council Delegate Dwight Witherspoon (Black Mesa, Forest Lake, Hardrock, Pinon, Whippoorwill) stated, whose chapters are affected by the agreement. "Officers are stretched, having to decide which calls are the most important and often do not get to all of the calls."

BFC member, Mel R. Begay (Coyote Canyon, Mexican Springs, Naschitti, Tohatchi, Bahastl'a'a'), voiced his opposition to the legislation saying that the Navajo Nation is pushing off its responsibility to protect its own people.

"We put others in a position to be on the lookout for our government and laws," Delegate Begay said.

Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Tsah Bii Kin, Navajo Mountain, Shonto, Oljato), who also serves as a county supervisor for Navajo County, strongly supported the legislation.

Delegate Nez said the agreement simply allows Navajo communities to benefit from the resources being offered by the Navajo County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Kelly Clark said, "I've never had a complaint about treatment of people, I would not tolerate that," easing concerns over the possible mistreatment of Navajo people by his officers.

The BFC approved the legislation with three supporting votes and one opposing.

Immediately following the agreement's passage, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed the agreement.

"With this agreement, we are going to provide safer communities for our people who live in Navajo County. I want to thank everyone who worked on this document to make our communities safer for our children," said President Shelly in a Feb. 19 news release.

Similar cross-commission agreements have recently been made with other counties. An upcoming agreement is currently in process with San Juan County in Utah.

#

For news on the latest legislative branch activities, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org